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C O N F I D E N T I A L ANKARA 002100

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [SY](#) [LE](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKISH MFA DEFENDS GOT APPROACH TO SYRIA,
EXPRESSES INTEREST IN OBSERVING LEBANESE ELECTIONS

Classified By: DCM Robert S. Deutsch for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) DCM discussed Turkey's Syria policy April 12 with MFA Director General for the Middle East Oguz Celikkol. Celikkol defended President Sezer's April 13-14 visit to Damascus, and asserted that Sezer will deliver the same message to the Syrians that the international community has agreed upon: Syrian troops must withdraw from Lebanon and the SARG must not interfere in Lebanese elections. Celikkol's deputy, Safak Gokturk, said that Sezer's visit will "not only be niceties."

2. (C) Celikkol and Gokturk explained that Turkey has tried hard to improve relations with Syria since coming to the brink of war in 1998, and declared that as a neighbor Turkey cannot just cut off ties completely until Syria complies with UNSCR 1559. Turkey supports 1559 and will tell Syria just that. Turkey's overarching priority is to continue building economic and political ties with Syria; the GOT believes this will draw Syria into the world community. Turkey also engages with Syria so that the SARG will no longer shelter and support PKK terrorists as it did until 1999. DCM noted that the international community prefers to limit communication with Damascus on Lebanon to the UN Envoy Roed-Larsen channel, and that there is a risk Syria will exploit any possible deviation from the precise message Roed-Larsen is pursuing with the Syrians. Celikkol said Sezer would also raise other issues, e.g. Iraq and Palestinian terrorists, as well.

3. (C) Celikkol said that Turkey is interested in participating in some way in observing the elections in Lebanon, but that the GOL has yet to approach the GOT on this issue. He thought the UN might be an appropriate body to monitor the elections. MFA Department Head for the Middle East Mehmet Kemal Bozay subsequently told Deputy PolCouns that Turkey is also monitoring the election observer issue in the EU and OSCE in case one of those bodies takes the lead.
EDELMAN